

HONORING THE CONNECTICUT
STATE LIBRARY'S "DIGGING
INTO HISTORY" PROGRAM

HON. ROSA L. DeLAURO

OF CONNECTICUT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 14, 2019

Ms. DeLAURO. Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise today to take a moment to recognize an extraordinary program sponsored by the Connecticut State Library—"Digging Into History." This extraordinary program brought together fifteen Connecticut high school students, five of which I am proud to say are from my District, to take part in a unique learning experience and community service project.

The first German offensive against American troops during World War I took place on April 20, 1918 in the village of Seicheprey, France. It was Connecticut troops from the 102nd Infantry Regiment, also known as the "Yankee Division," that came under attack that morning as the German forces launched the surprise offensive. The battle of Seicheprey occurred on the southern side of the St. Mihiel salient. There, three companies of the Yankee Division's 102nd Regiment occupied a trench, known as the Sibille trench. The battle raged throughout the day with heavy losses on both sides and the village was destroyed. After the war's end, Connecticut citizens collected \$5,000 to help rebuild the water supply and installed a fountain with a plaque in the town square. A bond had been forged between Connecticut and Seicheprey.

In recognition of the 100th anniversary of this battle and as a way to strengthen that bond, the "Digging Into History" program was created. The program brought fifteen Connecticut high school students to Seicheprey to take part in a community service project to clear and restore a section of the trenches Connecticut soldiers occupied, with the goal of creating a historic attraction to help spur tourism in the region. The students worked with sixteen French students as well as military historians to clear vegetation from the trenches, re-dig sections and restore the trenches to how they appeared a century ago.

It was an extraordinary opportunity for these young people, bringing the history of World War I to life for them, and today they are sharing that experience with the presentation of "Digging Into History: Back From the Trenches." Having had visited Normandy and other such sites myself, I can imagine how thrilling this project must have been. Though Congressional business keeps me in Washington for the event in Hartford, I hope to be able to see the presentation myself soon.

These fifteen young men and women have been incredible ambassadors for their communities, the State of Connecticut, and our nation. I am honored to have this opportunity to extend my heartfelt congratulations to them for their remarkable work on this project. I also want to extend my deepest thanks and appreciation to the Connecticut State Library for their work to organize this once in a lifetime experience for these young people. I have no doubt it is a journey they will never forget.

NEW HOME, NEW BYLAWS, SAME
MISSION: WPAOG HISTORY PART
IV (1996-2019) SECTION A

HON. JOHN SHIMKUS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, November 14, 2019

Mr. SHIMKUS. Madam Speaker, I rise today to include in the RECORD Section A of the fourth and final installment of an article by Keith J. Hamel honoring the 150th Anniversary of the West Point Association of Graduates:

"When the Association of Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy moved into the Herbert Alumni Center in the winter of 1995, it was primed to capitalize on its past and, in the process, make new history as well. The AOG began on May 22, 1869, when a group of graduates, upon a suggestion from Robert Anderson, Class of 1825, held its first organizational meeting in the office of Dr. Horace Webster, Class of 1818. Out of this meeting came the Association's mission: "... to cherish the memories of our Alma Mater, and to promote the social intercourse and fraternal fellowship of its graduates." Ever since then, the AOG mission has been about serving both West Point ("Alma Mater") and the Long Gray Line ("its graduates").

In the first stage of its history (1869-1900), covered in our Winter 2019 issue, AOG was instrumental in moving the remains of the "Father of the Academy," Sylvanus Thayer, Class of 1808, to the West Point Cemetery and memorializing him with a statue. Also during this era, one of AOG's founding members, George Cullum, Class of 1833, bequeathed \$250,000 to build a memorial hall at West Point and \$10,000 for "necessary expenses" of the Association. In AOG's second stage (1901-45), outlined in our Spring 2019 issue, AOG raised money to purchase the Sanctuary Window in the newly built Cadet Chapel and introduced initiatives such as "Alumni Day" (first held on June 11, 1923) and ASSEMBLY magazine (which debuted in April 1942). The modern AOG (see the Summer 2019 issue) began to take shape in the late 1940s with the establishment of the West Point Alumni Foundation and the granting of tax-exempt status by the IRS. Thanks to these developments in AOG's third era (1946-95), fundraising for both the West Point Superintendent's Fund and AOG's annual appeal steadily grew, and in 1972, Major General William Knowlton '43JAN, the 49th Superintendent, removed the AOG active duty officer from the Office of Assistant to the Superintendent, freeing the Association to solicit money for the Academy and to establish new services for graduates. To meet these dual objectives, AOG created both a Directorate of Development (fundraising) and a Directorate of Alumni Affairs (fraternal fellowship) in the 1970s and 1980s, setting up the themes that dominate the present era of its 150-year history.

1997-2002: THE BICENTENNIAL CAMPAIGN

In 1996, after AOG had moved into Herbert Alumni Center, Edward "Shy" Meyer '51, Chairman of the Association, noted that it was time for the Association to refocus its fundraising efforts. "The bulk of money has gone into the Alumni Center and alumni type things rather than the Superintendent's projects," Meyer said, according to the minutes of the October 1996 Board of Trustees meeting. "With 2002 coming up for a target, we have a responsibility as alumni to do something for the Academy in the way of a gift." In June 1990, AOG's Long Range Planning Committee had agreed to raise \$100 million in 10 years for USMA, based on a long-

range analysis of Academy needs through 2002. However, debate over whether to run an Army Athletics Center Campaign or a Cadet Leadership Opportunities Campaign in conjunction with the Academy's Bicentennial in 2002 slowed efforts to get the Bicentennial Campaign fully underway. All that changed in 1996. Now with focus provided by Meyer and the West Point Fund Committee, chaired by Jack Hammack '49, and in partnership with Lieutenant General Dan Christman '65, USMA's 55th Superintendent, AOG's fundraising moved into high gear, thanks in large part to lessons learned in the campaign to raise funds for Herbert Alumni Center. The Bicentennial Campaign kicked off with a goal to raise \$150 million for West Point between 1997 and 2002.

In the six years preceding the Bicentennial Campaign, the average AOG annual collection was \$9.4 million, from fewer than 14,000 donors annually, but during the campaign, those numbers jumped to \$28.8 million and 21,000 donors per year. But even more than raising more money and growing the donor pool, the Bicentennial Campaign provided the vehicle to aid AOG's burgeoning maturity. It made it necessary for the Association to grow and professionalize, developing new office systems where none had existed, establishing gift acceptance and donor recognition policies and procedures, and educating graduates to overcome general objections of some alumni toward fundraising. It also transformed the physical, academic, and extracurricular landscape of West Point, because the result of the campaign was not just "something for the Academy in the way of a gift," but a collection of many significant and lasting gifts.

"The response to the Bicentennial Campaign was overwhelming," said Tom Dyer '67, who was Chairman of the West Point Fund during most of the Bicentennial Campaign, and who took over as AOG Chairman in January 2002. When the campaign closed on December 31, 2002, AOG had raised \$218.6 million for West Point, nearly \$70 million more than its initial goal. What's more, nearly half of all West Point graduates had given at least one gift. "Never in our wildest dreams did we think we would finish having raised nearly \$220 million!" said Dyer, addressing the success of the Bicentennial Campaign in his Chairman's Letter in the March/April 2003 issue of ASSEMBLY "What a great tribute to [all graduates] and dear friends who recognized how much the 'margin of excellence' enriches the cadets' experience."

EXPANDING AOG SERVICES

While AOG's Development team was busy raising funds for the Bicentennial Campaign, the AOG Alumni Support team was expanding services to graduates across a broad spectrum of programs. In fact, according to one Chairman and CEO Annual Report of this era, "the most rapidly expanding activity managed by the Association of Graduates is its Alumni Support Program."

In November 1996, the team hosted the first AOG Minority Alumni Conference. A year prior, the Association established the Minority Outreach Committee with the mission to enhance the participation of minority members in AOG programs and activities. More than 120 graduates and friends of West Point attended the first conference, raising and discussing issues of major concern to minority graduates. A second conference was held in April 1998. Attended by 107 participants, the objective of the conference was to translate those issues identified in 1996 into action plans to achieve specific objectives related to minority cadet recruiting, the experience of minority cadets at the Academy, AOG support of minority graduates, and fundraising for minority-related projects.